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The Power of the Cross, 1961

O.P. Kretzmann

Valparaiso University

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THE POWER OF THE CROSS

for

It is very easy for the fiftieth generation of the men and women after the
Cross to lose the vision of its continuing power and victory. We have seen the
tremendous contradiction between the faith proclaimed by the Church and the
faith by which men and women actually live and die in the streets of a mocking
world. We see the tremendous odds against which the Church of God must
fight, the crushing weight of a decaying social structure, the awful gap between
the faith we profess and the faith we live. We know that the things for which
we stand and the faith by which we live are today openly hated and despised
and cursed as they were when men and women screamed their hate and defiance
of God under a Cross nineteen hundred years ago.

There is always the immediate and eminent danger that our personal
lives and the life of the Church will be dominated by a crippling spirit of
doctor, anxiety, and fear. There are many who feel that there is only weariness
in the years before us, the pitiful stirring of burnt-out ashes of fires, the deadly
routine of tending altars which the world has forgotten.

Such a spirit of doubt and fear is neither reasonable nor Christian. There
is a continuing power about the Cross which towers over the momentary wrecks
of time. Everything else may change, the truths by which men attempt to live
might sink into chaos and night, the world may grow weary and old, but in the
Cross of Jesus Christ is the fountain of eternal power and everlasting youth.
The year of our Lord 1961 is still the day of the power of the Cross.

Although the Church seems to be beaten back from one area of human life
after another and apparently lives only on the crumbs of men's time and talents,
it is nevertheless true that as long as she lives close to the Cross it is the most
powerful phenomenon in the modern world. The Scriptures testify to the fact that
the entire period of the New Testament Church, which began with the sunrise of
Calvary and will end only with the last red sunset of the world, is a day of
power and victory. As members of the Church, we stand in the long tradition
of the day of power against the night which men have made for themselves.
As we sing our hymns and speak our prayers, we are in line with all the true
wealth and power of two thousand years—the sudden light over Bethlehem,
the Man from Nazareth who spoke words as never yet man spake, the dark hour
on Calvary, and the glorious hour in the resurrection garden, the long dragging
years with their red line of saints and martyrs, the conquering faith of
crusader and scholar and reformer—all these testify to the continuing power
of the Cross.

Today we may sometimes feel that the center of power has finally shifted
elsewhere. Surely men no longer live and die for God and Christ and His Church.
They live by guns and fear and hate. They follow hypnotic voices shouting to
the ends of the earth. They die for blood and race and soil. And yet, again
and again, the continuing power of the Cross demonstrates itself in the lives of
men. It is strange how often modern man pausing for a moment in the madness
of life without God sees the power and glory of the Crucified on the dark horizon
of his world. Somehow he seems to know that the figure of the Son of God bearing
the sins of the world is the answer to all the problems which trouble and perplex
the souls of men.

Perhaps we can see this most clearly if we notice that the full forces now
aligned against Christ and His Church pour the most striking testimony to the
continuing power of His Cross. Somehow they cannot leave Him alone. No one
in the world this morning hates Caesar or Napoleon or Genghis Khan. Men do not
hate the dead. Hate dies when the object hated dies. Men no longer clinch their
fists against a Bismarck or stand guard over the tomb of a Nelson. But they
still clinch their fists against Christ and they still stand guard over His tomb. They say He is helpless and dead, but they pour out literature against Him and His Church, they build philosophies of government and life constructed to shut Him out, they clinch their fists when His very Name is mentioned. Why? Men do not fight ghosts. There are two kinds of faith—the saving faith of the redeemed and the protesting faith of the damned—and both of them always testify to the continuing power of Christ and His Cross.

It is this sense of power which the modern Church must recover. We must again be stirred by the promise of the Cross, by its everlasting power and by the sure knowledge that through the forgiveness of sins it can make our succession of common days a triumphant march to a better world and the high fulfilment of our Cross-given destiny. Seeming defeat will be turned into victory. Human indifference and human bitterness will only cause us to turn from earth to heaven. Weakness will compel us to turn to the Cross for strength and hope.

The life of the world and the individual proceeds by two's. There is an evident duality in life, body and soul, good and evil, light and darkness, night and day. One day this duality will end. There will be only one victory. It is ours. Through the shadows of the evening time of the world our eyes should be fixed once more today on the Cross of Jesus Christ, eternally young, eternally strong, and finally, eternally victorious.